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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND  
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND  
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria/Iran, Syria/Iraq,  
Syria/HAMAS, Israel/Palestinians/EU Aid, Lebanon (4/12)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers today reported that Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Chairman of the Iranian Expediency Council, will arrive in Damascus today on a formal visit of a few days.

Papers also reported that President Asad chaired a cabinet meeting during which he discussed mechanisms of cooperation between the Ministries of Information and Foreign Affairs, and holding annual meetings of Syrian ambassadors.

On Syrian-Iraqi relations, papers reported shipment of Syrian humanitarian aid to the Iraqi capital as a gift from the Syrian people, the Syrian Red Crescent and the Dutch Red Cross to the Iraqi people. The caravan carried tents, medicine and other required supplies. Chairman of the Syrian Red Crescent Organization, Abdulrahman al-Attar, said that additional medicine and medical equipment will be sent to Iraq next week, and that 1500 tons of aid will be sent in cooperation with the Greek Friends Assembly during the next couple of weeks.

Papers also featured a meeting between Vice President Shara and Khaled Meshal, Chairman of Hamas Political Bureau. Meshal briefed Shara on the outcome of his tour to Arab and foreign countries, which focused on the importance of respecting the Palestinian people's choices and enhancing their national unity to realize their legitimate aspirations of establishing a sovereign Palestinian state with Jerusalem as a capital and realizing their legitimate right of return.

End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"Vice President Shara reviews with Khaled Meshal, Head of Hamas Political Bureau, recent developments in the Palestinian arena and Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/12)

"A shipment of Syrian humanitarian aid is dispatched to Iraq" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 4/12)

"Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Chairman of Iranian

Expediency Council, is to visit Syria today" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 4/12)

"Iran ends Uranium enrichment work. Ahmadinejad: Iran joins the club of countries possessing nuclear technology" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/12)

"Lebanese judiciary declares beginning of investigation of terrorists who planned to assassinate Hassan Nasrallah, Hizbollah SecGen. President Lahoud: We reject any attempt to harm the Lebanese resistance. Karami: Nassrallah is on the front line to defend Lebanon. Druze leaders in Lebanon: No to instability. Al-Hoss stresses the importance of enhancing relations with Syria" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/12)

"Five US soldiers killed, one wounded in Iraq. Controversy over prime minister position remains unsettled. An opinion poll shows drastic decline in the popularity of President Bush and the Republicans" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/12)

"After Rice, Powell acknowledges grave mistakes in Iraq. The Ministerial meeting by Iraq's neighboring countries is due today. Iraq boycotts the meeting" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 4/12)

"Prodi promises a quick withdrawal of Italian troops from Iraq: Peace and Europe are main points on the agenda of his forthcoming cabinet" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/12)

### 13. Editorial Block Quotes:

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"Who Stop Israeli Terrorism?"  
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Omar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (4/12): "Europe has joined Israel as partner in the collective punishment against Palestinians, through its decision to halt financial aid to the Palestinians...."

"Palestinians are facing unprecedented injustice.... The West in general and Europe in particular are responsible for the human disaster the Palestinian people are facing. They also bear the historical responsibility for everything that has happened to this people and their just cause in the past and present. It is a shame for humanity that the Palestinian people remain the only people on earth who are not enjoying their most basic rights...."

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"Satirical Chapters in Democracy"  
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Ali Qasim, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (4/12): "Israel has decided to boycott the Palestinian Authority and every party that deals with it...."

"When Israel's aggressive escalation failed to change the equation, Israel turned to political escalation, relying on American and European sanctions and usQg them as a basis for its political approach toward other countries and forces. Yet we heard no one protesting or objecting.

"Through their attempt to push the Palestinian people toward starvation and deprivation as a punishment for their democracy, Europe and the United States have launched a war on democracy and are insisting on besieging and strangling it...."

"In such an international situation there is a farce, a black political comedy, a blind compliance with a logic that runs contrary to everything, and a setback to human intellect...."

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"From Jenin to Baghdad"

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Isam Dari, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (4/12): "In April 2002 the world witnessed in Jenin the ugliest Israeli massacre committed against Palestinians.... One year later the same scenario was repeated in the more appalling massacre represented by the fall of Baghdad....

"The scenario of the Jenin massacre was a rehearsal for the Baghdad massacre and the Iraq massacres. It is not surprising that several reports indicated an Israeli role in planning, training, and perhaps directly participating in the invasion and destruction of Iraq and the looting of its wealth by today's Tartars....

"The same scenario is repeated from Jenin to Baghdad while the world turns a blind eye, describing the declared and premeditated terrorism as self-defense or an effort to spread democracy and using siege and starvation to punish a people for their democratic choices....

"Arabs are not allowed to defend themselves, their territories, or their rights. They are not allowed to resist. Israel and Bush's administration, meanwhile, violate all the laws of earth and heaven without anyone protesting, even if only to spare themselves the blame. It is a twisted world that one cannot describe because it is beyond description."

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